

SPECIAL EDITION

Susan Beckett & the Story of Groundcover News

GROUNDCOVER

NEWS AND SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUND UP

SUMMER 2018

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GROUNDCOVER

SPECIAL EDITION

Susan Beckett & The Story of
Groundcover News

INSIDE:

SECTION ONE From the ground up: A Brief History of Groundcover News page 2

SECTION TWO Voices page 7

SECTION THREE Perspectives page 11

SECTION FOUR Reflections page 14

GROUNDCOVER
MISSION:

Creating opportunity and a voice for low-income people while taking action to end homelessness and poverty.

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Introduction to this Special Edition

You hold in your hands a very special edition of Groundcover News.

Each year, Groundcover publishes one or two special issues placing a spotlight on different aspects of Washtenaw County's street newspaper – from extended profiles of the vendors who sell Groundcover, to anthologies featuring highlights of past issues, to collections of outstanding writings gleaned from street newspapers around our country and abroad.

In this edition, we come full-circle to revisit the extraordinary individual who put Groundcover on the map and has been expertly guiding the thriving non-profit organiza-

tion throughout the past decade of its operation: Susan Beckett.

The story of Groundcover News cannot be told without also telling that of its founder and publisher. For our beloved streetpaper's remarkable success did not come easily or happen overnight, but rather sprang from the vision, courage, compassion and determination of one local leader who stared social injustice in our community right in the face and refused to look away – ever.

The essay by Will Shakespeare, featured below, notes the similarities between Susan's efforts to address social injustices here in Washtenaw County and those of Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr. Those familiar with Susan's lifetime of service know that such an exalted comparison is far from hyperbole. It takes a rarefied combination of head and heart to achieve something as big and bold as Susan has with Groundcover.

In this Special Edition we celebrate Susan Beckett's lifetime of service to our community, retracing her journey and that of Groundcover News. We hope this collection of new and reprinted articles – many of them written by Susan, herself – will shed light on how, and why, Groundcover became the paragon of grassroots social change it is today.

Andrew Nixon
Editor

Susan Beckett: local drum-major for social justice

by Will Shakespeare
Groundcover Vendor #258

Susan Beckett, a longtime fixture of the Ann Arbor community, has used what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called the “soul force” and an individual's right to “creative protest” in order to start a community newspaper that creates opportunity for the poor, the underserved and the homeless of Washtenaw County.

Founded by Beckett in 2010, Groundcover News is a street newspaper with a current diverse readership of approximately 6,000. The writing topics are varied.

Topics on social justice are near and dear to Beckett's heart. Taking actions to address social concerns such as poverty, homelessness, affordable housing, health care, unemployment and community mental health are important to our vendors, writers, editors and office staff. Our campus community, our faith-based community, our homeless community and all our stakeholders are interested in the issues of social justice.

Today it is an honor and a rare privilege to pay tribute to a community leader who has exemplified what Dr. King described as “a drum-major for social justice.”

Why would we print that?

by Susan Beckett
Publisher

Originally published September, 2017

We got immediate feedback from readers that the crimes-committed-by-undocumented-immigrants statistic in Lit Kurt's August response to my July editorial, “Totalitarian Impulses,” was incorrect. That was my first reaction, too. In fact, prior to publication we challenged Lit on it and asked her to back it up with a source, which she did with an article from *The Hill*.

Some doubted that it was a credible source; however, the climate in our country suggests that it is credible – in the believable sense of the word – to many. And that is why we printed it.

There is no way to have a discussion of issues in which we can learn

from each other if one side is always censoring the other. *The Hill* published multiple articles examining the assumptions underlying the conflicting claims on immigrant crime levels. They acknowledged that legal immigrants are more law-abiding than native-born Americans. And they pointed out that the typical undocumented immigrant commits multiple non-violent felonies by falsifying documents to obtain drivers' licenses, social security cards and green cards so they can work and avoid breaking other laws. It is an accepted fact that approximately 75 percent of undocumented immigrants fraudulently get Social Security cards with which they get jobs and pay taxes.

Another article in *The Hill*, by retired criminal forensic criminologist Ron Martinelli, cited the U.S. Sentencing Commission report that 75 percent of all defendants who were convicted and sentenced for federal drug-related

Community engagement and citizen participation are part and parcel of Beckett's repertoire. In addition to managing a newsroom business as an entrepreneur, she could be found at most public events, meetings and conferences which address poverty, inequality and social injustice. She has heeded Dr. King's call to action and joined the Poor People's Campaign – a fine example of peaceful, nonviolent direct action.

We do not know exactly how Susan Beckett wants to be remembered when she retires as the CEO and Publisher of Groundcover News. But we do know that her stars are aligned with the drum-major instincts as explicated by Dr. King.

crimes were undocumented immigrants. They also found that undocumented immigrants accounted for 17 percent of all drug trafficking sentences, one-third of all federal prison sentences and 22 to 37 percent of murders in the United States. These statistics are suspect – as are all concerning undocumented immigrants – because a substantial number of people who are in the country illegally live in the shadows and are not accurately counted in the census. The percentage who commit crimes can seem extremely high since entering the country illegally is considered a crime itself.

One of Groundcover's roles is providing a platform for multiple voices, especially those of our vendors. There is quite a diverse set of opinions, beliefs and values among our readers and vendors, too. We had a very lively discussion about the immigration article dur-

see PRINT, page 5

From the Ground Up – how Groundcover News took roots on the streets of Ann Arbor: A Conversation with Susan Beckett

by Sandor Slomovits

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Susan Beckett is the publisher of Groundcover News, a street newspaper sold in Ann Arbor and throughout Washtenaw County directly by vendors – many of whom are experiencing challenges related to poverty.

Beckett is trim, wears her hair short, with a straightforward, matter-of-fact manner, but also has a vivid, entertaining way of talking about the history of the paper and its vendors. We talked in Groundcover's office in the basement of Bethlehem United Church of Christ, in downtown Ann Arbor. I began by asking how long she's lived in Ann Arbor, and what brought her here.

Susan: I started [at the University of Michigan] in 1971. I didn't graduate for a really long time. I was a creative writing major and sometime around the middle of my junior year I realized that I just didn't have it in me to be a starving artist. I dropped out for a semester, talked with one of my wise uncles who said, “You should take some technical writing and computer courses because there's plenty of jobs out there for people with those skills.” So I went back to school, but wasn't able to graduate, and my parents wisely said, “You're on your own now.”

I got a technical writing job at Comshare and wrote documentation then spent the next 10 years doing computer programming.

I eventually got married and really wanted to have children, and they weren't coming, so I started back to school to get certified to teach elementary education. And Comshare went through hard times, I got laid off, worked at a couple different places, had a miscarriage; eventually, though, I had my daughter. When she was about two I took her to the Sunshine Special, a nursery school on Scio Church Road... And when she was two-and-a-half she said, “I want to go full-time.” And I said, “Your friends have to go full-time because their parents are working.” And she said, “Well, get a job!” (*Sustained laughter.*)

I said, “OK, fine.” So I started student teaching that summer and then immediately got pregnant again. And my son did not want me to get a job. He



Beckett hit the streets with Kevin Spangler of Boober Tours and Officer Paddock of the AAPD during 2018 International Streetpaper Vendor Appreciation Week.

wanted to just putz around with me. I did a lot of substitute teaching, mostly in my kids' schools, which was great 'cause I got to know everybody.

And then my mother passed away in December of 2009, kind of suddenly, and I just sort of went catatonic.

Sandor: How old were your kids at that time?

Susan: They were grown, 20 and 17. I just kind of lost all initiative. If somebody asked me to do something, I'd do it, but I just didn't generate anything on my own. And somebody from Temple Beth Emeth, where I was on the social action committee, said, “There's this meeting of the Religious Coalition for the Homeless that Ron Gregg is organizing, and we need somebody to go, and can you go?” Of course the answer was, “Sure I can, because I'm not doing anything else!”

At one point I said, “I know this isn't going to solve all the problems that have been laid out, but it will solve some of the problems for some of the people.” And I told them about the street newspaper [I had learned about in Seattle the previous summer]. And several people said, “That sounds interesting.” I said, “I'll look into finding out about a street newspaper.” And several other people, including Sandy Schmoker, who's been a volunteer since

the beginning, said, “Well, I think that's a good idea and I'll help you.”

At that time there was a coalition of American newspapers, and I contacted them and found out that they had just hired a guy, the first time they had a staff person, who would help get a paper started. He said, “Here's the PDF of our manual for how to get started, and lucky you, a paper just started in Toledo three months ago, and so they can show you the ropes.” He gave me

“By the time somebody gets homeless they've pretty much burned every bridge, and people are reluctant to resume contact with somebody who's likely to be asking for something. So, by becoming independent again, it allows them to repair personal relationships.”

– Susan Beckett

contact information for the person down there. I called and Amanda said, “You can definitely make a paper work there. If we can do it in Toledo, there's no question you can in Ann Arbor. You have such a vibrant downtown. How about if I come up and meet with you, because I love to

come to Ann Arbor.”

She came up and met with me and Sarah Heidt from the Religious Coalition for the Homeless. We met at one of the old Borders Bookstores and the first thing she did, she went to all the free magazines, and said, “OK, in the environment you're in, you're going to have to have at least some color, probably want a 12-page format, just call up any of these guys and find out who does their printing, find out who the local printers are...” She just went through everything with us. ...

She called the next day and said, “I

talked with the person who gave us our startup funding, and he's going to do the same for you. One Matters is going to give you a check for \$1,000, and it'll take no more than \$800 to print your first edition; and then you can use the money you get from that, plus the extra couple hundred to print your second edition, and then you should be off and running. That's all the seed money you'll need.”

This all happened at the beginning of 2010, just a few days after that first meeting with the Religious Coalition for the Homeless, and from there, things moved fast. Susan wanted to gauge community interest before going further, and so she made an appointment with Ellen Schulmeister, Executive Director of the Delonis Center at that time. (The Delonis Center is Ann Arbor's homeless shelter and the location of the Shelter Association of Washtenaw County, which provides housing and other services for between 1,300 and 1,500 people experiencing homelessness each year.) Susan and Ellen were to meet at Sweetwaters Café, but Ellen was running late. While Susan waited, she saw an acquaintance.

Susan: We said “Hello,” and he asked why I was there. I told him and he said, “I might know somebody who'd be an editor for you.” I said, “You know we really don't have any money to pay anybody.” And he said, “She just got laid off because of the recession, and I think she's looking for something to do. She might do this for you, anyway.” So he gave me Laurie Lounsbury's contact information. I called her and she said, “Yes!” (*Laughter.*) (Lounsbury now sings with the local band, She-Bop.)

I met with Ellen Schulmeister, and she said, “Yes, I think there's a place for this in the community,” and, “Yes, you can come make a presentation to the people at the community meal.”

Marquise Williams, also a longtime Groundcover volunteer, and I went to the Delonis Center and, after telling them what it was about, passed around a clipboard where people could put their name and if they were interested in writing and/or selling the paper. About two-thirds of the people said they were interested in writing, and about a third said they were interested in selling. We contacted all the people who'd signed the clipboard, we put up flyers in a few places, started having meetings over at First Baptist Church, up on Washington, organizing meetings – that's how we came up with the

see CONVERSATION, page 4

From the ground up – A Conversation with Susan Beckett

continued from page 3

name, Groundcover. We had all kinds of suggestions and that was the one that got the most votes.

Our first issue came out in July 2010, and we made it the July-August issue. We printed 5,000 copies; I think we sold a few hundred. Then we came out in September, and shortly after that we started printing monthly.

At first, we found our vendors at places like the community meals and the First Baptist dinner on Tuesday nights. Our early vendors were really good about talking to other people and reaching out. And we did presentations pretty frequently. We were going to the breakfasts at St. Andrew's at least a few times a week. That was where people could get papers. St. Andrew's got us a couple of big bins and a place to keep them.

Then, in one of our issues, we put that we were looking for office space, and Bethlehem United Church of Christ contacted us and said, "We have space and it's something that our congregation is committed to, so come take a look." They've been wonderful to us – we trade ad space for most of the rent and they provide the electricity, cleaning service, the Internet, which we also use for the phone – I mean, really incredible.

I had never been somebody who believed much in destiny, or the hand of God, or anything like that, but this experience was.... I can't really ascribe it to much else. So much fell into place so fast. You know, in my personal life I tend to try to plan and make sure and organize, but Groundcover, I've kind of just operated on faith, that if it's needed, it'll show up. And it has!

I asked Susan about her childhood and family experiences to get a sense of what may have led to her work, first in computers and later in founding Groundcover News. Her father, who immigrated to the U.S. from Germany when he was thirteen years old, was an engineer who worked on the guidance systems for some of the NASA projects. But, as she explains, it was her mother who pioneered her interest in computers:

My mother went back to school when I was about 11 to learn computer programming. Eventually she became a vice president at Chubb Insurance Company in charge of systems analysis. She was one of the glass ceiling shatterers. But she grew up in the [Great] Depression. Her father died when she was 12, and they struggled. My grandmother and

all the girls knitted to try to make some money. It was always a very big deal to my grandmother. She said, "I never want to rely on a soup kitchen or anything like that again." That made an impression on me. I knew how much she wanted to provide for herself in a dignified manner.

And there was more. For the last 30 years Susan has been a volunteer lobbyist with RESULTS, an organization that lobbies nationally for proven low-cost solutions to issues of poverty and hunger. "When I started, there were still 40,000 children dying every day from preventable disease and hunger," states Susan. "I've always been drawn to children and just couldn't tolerate the thought of kids going through that and parents going through that...." (*Her voice trails off.*)

I tell her that I know that none of us are happy to know that there are people out there who are suffering, who are having a very hard time, in some cases needlessly dying, but relatively few of us say, "OK, here is what I'm going to do about it."

She agrees, "People feel powerless."

So I ask her again what was different for her? What else in her childhood pointed to her saying, 'I'm actually going to do something'? And she reminds me that her father's family left Germany to escape from the Nazis, that they were relatively lucky and most got out.

"Still it loomed pretty large in my childhood as something I wasn't going to stand and be passive about. I guess I made a decision back when I was like 10 years old that I wasn't going to be passive."

Susan: I want to go back to something you said earlier, about how and why so few people actually do something. That's part of why Groundcover operates the way it does, where it's sold only person-to-person on the street, because it's kind of an entry point for doing something. I think one of the reasons that people often don't do anything, is because they...

Sandor: Don't know where to start.

Susan: Yeah, they don't know where to start, they don't know the people, and they personally have no commerce with the people who need that kind of help. Everybody's a little afraid to just go up to somebody who's holding a cup. But Groundcover provides a medium of exchange in many ways.

And a lot of our customers have gone on to befriend their vendor in many ways. Some great relationships have come out of that. There are parishioners at St. Mary who go out for lunch or dinner with some of our vendors, sometimes have them over for dinner. They've bought them whole sets of winter outdoor clothes. A parishioner at St.

Francis just gave one of our vendors a bicycle so that he can get around better. Tony (a Groundcover vendor) has done yard work and building repairs for several of his customers, and I'm pretty sure

"I had never been somebody who believed much in destiny, or the hand of God, or anything like that, but this experience was.... I can't really ascribe it to much else. So much fell into place so fast. You know, in my personal life I tend to try to plan and make sure, and organize, but Groundcover, I've kind of just operated on faith, that if we needed, it'll show up. (Laughter.) And it has!"

– Susan Beckett

There is an especially poignant story. There was a little girl at St. Francis who had cancer and Tony, he would write on every paper he sold, "Pray for Mariel." Her parents were so touched that they invited him to the funeral. It really made a big difference to them. And he was devastated. Even though he knew it was coming, when she finally died, he was devastated.

Sandor: What is Groundcover's circulation these days?

Susan: I think we sold about 7,500 papers in March, which is an uptick from where we had been [earlier] this year. When we started, our monthly



James is one of many Groundcover vendors who unloads the printer's delivery truck and receives 10 free papers for doing so.

circulation was probably between 1,500 and 2,000. Then it quickly grew. We were pretty much doubling every year. I can tell you when the [Great] Recession broke. 2012 was a great year for us. We were between 9,000 and 11,000 a month and growing like crazy. And then the Recession broke in Ann Arbor, and people started getting jobs; and our more capable vendors got mainstream jobs, which was fantastic – it's what we wanted. But it had (*she laughs*) a negative effect on our circulation because they weren't out there selling anymore, and so we dropped down to 5-6,000. And we're just starting to climb back up now, which I hope doesn't mean that fewer people are getting jobs.

Sandor: That's an example of a good unintended consequence.

Susan: Yeah. When we started Groundcover, I was thinking it was a way to help people get through the Recession, and I was fine with having it end when it was no longer needed. And in terms of the job situation, we're kind of at that point where there's enough jobs available for people who are capable of working full-time on a set schedule and don't have the kind of blemished past that keep people from hiring them. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who don't fit that category. We still have 35 to 40 people selling for us – people who have severe arthritis or migraine headaches, or they have a prison record. We have one person who is legally blind, and disability doesn't cover enough for people to actually live. It just covers enough to have an apartment on the edge of Ypsilanti, or a room, maybe, in Ann Arbor. That's

see CONVERSATION, page 5

Conversation with Susan Beckett

continued from page 4

all. And then you have nothing left to eat or anything else. So, until there's an alternative, I guess we're it.

Sandor: So Groundcover helps provide these things – food, et cetera – that disability doesn't?

Susan: Right, but because now the majority of our vendors fit into that category – they're people who can't work every day, or they can't work in the winter because it's too cold and it aggravates their arthritis – so they sell about 200 papers a month. That gives them enough to supplement Social Security. Then we still have a few people who are either new to town or have some other impediment to employment, but who work really hard and sell 600 to 900 papers a month.

Sandor: How much does it cost for the vendors to buy the paper?

Susan: Up until April 2017 it was 25 cents. Then we raised the cover price to two dollars, and we gave them one month where it was still 25 cents, so that they could build up some extra capital for that month, and then the price went up to 50 cents for them. And when somebody new comes, we still give them 10 free to start. And sometimes things happen, and they can get up to 10 papers on credit. And then there are certain things, like the first Thursday of every month at our social hour, we do a review of the articles in the paper, and everyone who talks about an article gets 10 free papers. When the truck comes in with the new batch of papers, everybody who helps unload gets 10 free papers. So there are ways to recapitalize, even if you didn't save the money....

Sandor: Do you feel Groundcover has been successful, that it has made a difference in lives?

Susan: I guess a lot depends on how you define "success." We've had a number of people who have been reconciled with their families. By the time somebody gets homeless they've pretty much burned every bridge, and people are reluctant to resume contact with somebody who's likely to be asking for something. So, by becoming independent again, it allows them to repair personal relationships. So that's been a huge success.

Some people, they're only here for a couple of months, they need to get enough money to buy decent clothes or buy tools for their trade so that they can get back to work in whatever they were doing before whatever catastrophe struck. We've had a number of people



Madeline Diehl's 2017 Therapeutic Writing Workshop was one of many vendor support programs Beckett helped arrange.

who have come out of prison who have been very enterprising and very capable. Whatever it was that they did years ago that landed them in prison, they'd moved beyond that.

We had one man, he was selling Groundcover, he used his profits to buy a moped, fixed it up and sold it, bought a minibike, fixed it up and sold it, bought a car, fixed it up and sold it. He was doing all of that on the side, now that he had money to work with. He was a very enterprising guy, he just needed startup capital, and eventually he managed to clear up whatever it was that was keeping him from driving and got his trucker's license. Last I knew he was driving a truck back and forth across the country, was back to living with his family somewhere in Appalachia... Life was good again.

There was a woman named Peggy, who had leg problems – in and out of surgeries, rehab – but most months she still managed to sell 800 papers or more. She's now, for the last couple of years, been working as a peer counselor for Avalon. (Avalon is an Ann Arbor-based organization that helps to provide permanent housing for people who are homeless and who have a mental or physical disability.) She still sells papers, mostly just on Sundays, but she's successfully stabilized her life, and is helping other people stabilize theirs now.

We had a veteran who, when he first started with us, was homeless, really at loose ends. For him, [selling papers] was more having something to do and a reason to talk to people. I think that was more important to him than the money – to experience some success at something. Now he's gotten housing, he's built himself a life again. It just helped him through that interim, that

waiting, where you have no sense of agency.

We've had a number of people in the construction trades, they don't have insurance, they get hurt, they need an operation, all their assets get drained, and they end up either losing or selling their tools. So Groundcover has provided a way for them to recover. Some of them have sold Groundcover while they were in a cast. It was something they could still do through rehab. And when they finally are able to work again, they have the resources to buy the tools that they need.

Sandor: What is your sense, what would have happened to these people if Groundcover had not been there?

Susan: We have had a number of people on disability. They were just so depressed, struggling all the time to make ends meet, and falling short and falling more heavily into debt. That's the other thing: people used to... go to payday loans, which is really ridiculous for somebody who has no payday. They would consider their Social Security check to be a payday. And so people were getting very heavily indebted. My sense is that there would have been more suicides, quite honestly. People with no way to get out from under – there would have been more suicides and more substance abuse.

Why would we print that?

continued from page 2

ing our monthly paper review, with several vendors on each side of the issue and quite a few others listening carefully as each side explained the fallacies they perceived in the other's argument. In this issue [Sept. 2017] we are publishing two letters on the subject that we received from readers.

You also have to moderate your expectations. Almost everybody now is housed, and some of it is not great, a room somewhere without much in the way of facilities, but it's a safe place to be. And we still have some people who are getting hotels by the night, but again, they're not on the streets. And then we have about five people who just this past year got their own place, and they pay for it out of Groundcover money. It's a big improvement in circumstances. And we've been able to get a lot of people hooked up with the kind of counseling they need, financial counseling in some cases.

Every month we do some kind of development course. Sometimes it is advanced sales training, sometimes it is introduction to computers, sometimes it's more advanced things with computers. We've done a financial literacy course several times, we've done mindfulness a couple of times, we've done anger management a couple of times. We operate from both what we see that they need and what they ask for. We've had a number of writing courses. Some people have actually become really accomplished writers, and many are seriously repairing their credit now.

We have a new partner in our financial literacy program this year, the United Way, and they have been terrific. They have an individual coach who meets with people. We do a matched savings program, like we have for Kevin Spangler. Kevin is our latest poster child. (Spangler is a Groundcover News vendor who, with the help of his Groundcover sales income, recently started what has become a very successful and fast growing pedicab business called Boober Tours.) If Kevin wants to buy a new pedicab, he puts in \$200, we'll put in \$400. So it's pretty motivating to get involved. But it turns out that really the most valuable part of it is just learning how to manage your money, and then this individual coaching. Kevin said that the coaching has saved him many thousands of dollars. We have a number of people undergoing credit repair. It's building a foundation for a better life.

Groundcover's creation story – Real Change and microcredit

by Susan Beckett

Originally published July 2010

“Real Change! Real Change!” exclaimed the man on the Seattle sidewalk as I passed through the supermarket doors. I was confused. Did he think I'd be giving him slugs? Upon learning he was homeless and offering to sell me a newspaper, I eagerly traded my dollar for his paper and had an aha moment – this was a brilliant application of micro-enterprise here in the United States!

Twenty years of working on solutions to global poverty familiarized me with microcredit projects of many forms. The Grameen bank became famous when it and Mohammed Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize, yet it was a Kenyan micro lender, Jamii Bora, that sprang to my mind.

After a couple of years of lending money to the very poor so they could start their own small businesses, Jamii



Inspired by similar projects such as *Real Change* in Seattle, Wash., Groundcover News was founded in 2010 and is a member of the International Network of Street Papers (INSP), whose membership spans 100 papers from 34 countries, with a combined readership of 5 million per edition.

Bora experimented with offering beggars small items like ribbons they could sell instead of begging. It was immediately apparent that most people

preferred selling to begging and many of them went on to become successful entrepreneurs.

Joyce Wairimu eventually opened six businesses and now employs many of her former colleagues. Wilson Maina, once a thief, now owns four businesses. He scours the streets for boys like him and has convinced hundreds to get started in a business instead of stealing. In 1999, Jamii Bora started with loans to 50 beggars in one of the worst slums in Nairobi. By the end of 2007, they had 170,000 savers and 60,000 borrowers.

Microcredit offers the poorest of the poor a chance at economic self-sufficiency. For many it is a path of redemption; an opportunity to overcome poor choices made or circumstances thrust upon them earlier in their lives. They have a saying at Jamii Bora: “We have fast climbers out of poverty and we have slow climbers, but everyone is a climber.” That’s my wish for this newspaper: that it provides an economic toe hold for our vendors to use in their climb, and that we as a community find the wisdom and awareness we need to nurture their efforts.

Five years of building community and creating opportunity

by Susan Beckett

Originally published July, 2016

It has been five years since the first issue of Groundcover News – a joint July and August issue – hit the streets just before Art Fair. In those short five years, we and the Water Hill Music Festival now help define what makes Ann Arbor special.

Hundreds of people have contributed to the 58 ensuing editions and dozens have helped out in the office. Dozens more have assisted in sundry ways ranging from assisting vendors with skill development and winter wear to providing food. Interns from Albion College, the University of Michigan, Community High, Rudolph Steiner School and Greenhills School forwarded our progress by assisting with business plan development, connecting vendors with services and selling opportunities, pursuing grants, developing social media and other marketing campaigns, writing and editing articles and staffing the office.

The Washtenaw County community purchased 300,000 monthly one-dollar issues of Groundcover News and over 6,500 of our semi-annual special editions that sell for \$10 apiece. Our first year we sold 23,000 copies; this year, 98,000. During that time span, 270 ven-

dors have sold Groundcover News. Of the initial 25, five are still actively selling, higher than our average retention rate of 14 percent. And four of those five are now housed.

While we have a cadre of regularly contributing writers, we get many one-time submissions from readers who have something important they want to share with their neighbors. Our features ranged from a primer on transgender etiquette to exposés on the criminal justice system. We have profiled 55 non-profit and government agencies around the county who provide services to the low-income community. Interviews featured sports figures like University of Michigan basketball forward Jordan Morgan, community members like super-volunteer Bob Milstein, and many of the people who sell Groundcover.

Our readers are diverse and the strong opinions expressed by one can deeply offend another. More than once we have received angry communications letting us know that an opinion, usually one that contains references to political parties, has alienated a reader who intends to no longer purchase Groundcover News.

More interesting to me is the number of readers who have probably been miffed but continue to buy and read

Groundcover anyway. It is a testament to their deep empathy for our vendors and broad-mindedness that they can disagree with the message, even vehemently, but not reject the messenger.

We are deeply grateful to the pioneering volunteers – including Laurie Lounsbury (our first editor), Sandy, Marquise Williams and David – board members, and vendors – especially Miriam, Rissa and Tony – who put us on their backs and carried us into your lives. Several organizations also played critical roles in our establishment and outreach: St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church (our first distribution spot), Bethlehem United Church of Christ (the site of our first and current office space), the Vineyard Church Friday night outreach at Liberty Park (or Pizza in the Park, as we call it), and the Hunger Meal at First Baptist Church of Ann Arbor.

It was impetus from the religious community that got us started and their support that has helped us thrive. Our established vendors have meaningful relationships with the attendees of the religious institutions at which they sell Groundcover. The parishioners at St. Francis alone purchase some 300 copies on a single Sunday each month. The St. Mary Student Parish worshippers began several years ago outfitting the vendors who sold to them with outer-

wear for winter, and for the last couple of years extended that to fundraising and soliciting Running Fit and others to obtain donated and discounted gloves, hats, and neck warmers for all active Groundcover vendors.

Local businesses have supported us with advertising and hospitality. The People’s Food Co-op was our first year-long advertiser, taking a chance on us after only six months. The Co-op and its member-shoppers have been consistent and generous supporters ever since and have played a big part in our continued growth.

And of course, you – our readers – are irreplaceable. The conversations you have with Groundcover vendors are often the highlights of their day. Even in the sub-zero temperatures and whipping wind, so many of you stop, take a moment to offer a word of encouragement and expose your bare hand as you trade a bill for a paper.

It has always been our intention to be an organization that builds community across economic, political and ethnic divides. Thanks to you, and to your commitment to being more than the labels that identify you, we have accomplished that together.

From all of us at Groundcover News, thank you!

Who deserves to relax?

by Susan Beckett

Originally published September, 2014

Groundcover News sales people did a remarkable job of selling this spring, exceeding our collective sales goal of 10,000 in May and earning a trip to a baseball game as a reward. The Detroit Tigers generously donated tickets to a Tuesday night game. The eight vendors who went enjoyed the experience, from seeing the giant tire on I-94 to our simple hot dog tailgate and the festive atmosphere at the stadium. One vendor brought her pre-teen daughter who had never been to Detroit and for many it was their first time at a major league sports event.

A customer who saw our Facebook post about the game expressed disapproval to one of our vendors who had opted out of attending. The customer’s opinion was that we shouldn’t be spending money on things like that. While I endorse frugality as a general rule, there is an assumption behind the disapproval that bears examination.

The assumption is that Groundcover News vendors are people living on the brink and asking for charity to survive and until they are able to support themselves in another way, they have no business spending money on entertainment. There are two points on which to take issue.

The first is assuming that either the ven-

dors or the organization was squandering money. The vendors did not have to put any of their money into attending the game. The tickets were donated and the organization covered the cost of transportation and the hot dog tailgate from a donation that was designated for discretionary spending. One vendor who did not even attend the game donated a case of water so everyone could bring a drink into the stadium and another brought a bag of chips to share. Cookies and brownies were donated by volunteers. And though we were delighted that everyone involved enjoyed the experience, the trip was the result of a deliberate and successful strategy to increase mutual support and overall sales.

The more serious issue is equating Groundcover News with asking for charity. It is a fine line we walk at Groundcover. A quarter of the cost of an issue of Groundcover goes toward covering publication costs and our publication does educate the community about homelessness and poverty with the goal of increasing the availability of effective solutions, and that is a charitable cause. However, the people who sell Groundcover are working – that is their job – and they are selling a publication that they think is worth at least one dollar. They work hard and one benefit of working is that you have money to spend as you see fit. Many people cannot afford housing in Ann Arbor, even if they save every dime they make. Does that mean they should

never spend their money on something they enjoy?

Some vendors chose not to go to the game so they could get in another four or five hours of work as they were focused on making enough for a down payment on a place to stay. Others chose not to go so they would be able to get to sleep early enough to be fresh and ready for the early morning Farmer’s Market crowd. At least one stayed behind to work another evening part-time job. As self-employed entrepreneurs, each vendor made their own business decision.

One who did go was Shawn, our top sales person for the last couple of months. You can see him at the Farmer’s Market in the morning, around the downtown post office in the afternoon, and at St. Mary Student Parish from early morning through early afternoon every Sunday. He works at least five hours a day, seven days a week – weather permitting – and made sure his finances were well taken care of in advance so that he could attend the game. Does he not deserve a chance



Tony, Joe and Susan were among the Groundcover vendors and volunteers who attended a Tigers baseball game as a reward for hitting a group sales goal.

to relax and socialize? And when local children stopped by our tailgate to sell very expensive candy, Shawn graciously bought from them and encouraged their efforts. He did so without judgment and with no strings attached. Thanks to some of you who have been paying forward the blessings bestowed on you, Shawn was able to pay forward his, and hopefully those kids will someday do the same.

Vendors feel the appreciation – corporations feel extorted

by Susan Beckett

Originally published March, 2014

Life can be so paradoxical – on the macro-level a situation can be disastrous, while on a micro-level it is magically perfect. We see that in vendors’ lives, perhaps recently unhoused yet beaming over their good fortune when someone gives them a generous tip or a piece of essential clothing or equipment. And I feel it when I look at our federal and state political systems and compare that to life in Ann Arbor.

During Vendor Appreciation Week in early February, Mayor John Hieftje and University of Michigan (U-M) basketball player Jordan Morgan took to the streets with some of our vendors, selling Groundcover News and educating the community about it. Both were so eloquent in describing the role Groundcover plays in providing a lifeline to those among us who need to get back on our feet. They moved and inspired me.

Groundcover vendors touch me on a regular basis with their commitment, generosity, and appreciation of their customers and of those who provide services the vendors use. Their excitement over selling with Morgan and the mayor was infectious. But they inspire me most when I hear them describe the mission of Groundcover and what it means to them. You soon will be able to hear them, too. Members of the new U-M Groundcover student group are interviewing many of our vendors, and we will be posting the interviews on our website, which also has photos and interviews from Vendor Appreciation Week on the page so named.

The contrast between our local celebrities’ ready interest in helping out and spending time with the disenfranchised, even though it meant spending hours at a time on the streets in frigid temperatures, and the difficulty of even scheduling a meeting with federal representatives, got me thinking once more about who is getting face time with our elected officials.

Before I could get all worked up again about corporations using wealth to gain access and influence, I stumbled upon a CNN interview with John Hofmeister, the former president of Shell Oil Company. Hofmeister was railing against politicians extorting campaign contributions from corporations! He claimed that corporate leaders who did not pay to play, found themselves threatened with onerous regulations or weeks testifying before hostile committee members. As Shell Oil has a company policy prohibiting corporate political donations, Hofmeister felt compelled to make them personally.

“I feel extorted,” Hofmeister told CNN’s Drew Griffin. “Every time I wrote a check I felt that it was a form of extortion, the price of entry, because of the reception that you got when you contributed versus the reception when you did not contribute.”

It seems the corruption is now systemic, with deleterious consequences for nearly all involved: politicians whose

lives have become more about raising money than creating good government, corporations whose profits are being siphoned off to exorbitant CEO salaries that find their way into political campaigns, and ordinary citizens who feel completely disconnected from and unrepresented by their government. The only winners are those using their wealth to manipulate government to give them unfair advantages.

This lack of integrity on a grand scale stands in such stark contrast to the integrity we encounter on a daily basis around here. People who trade convenience and cost to minimize their carbon footprints and buy locally grown and produced goods. People who stop on a frigid day to exchange pleasantries and provide a hand-up to fellow community members working to rebuild their lives. It is such a privilege to live in a community like ours – a privilege made possible by the many citizens who take the time to make it so great.

Meet James (Joe) – Vendor #103, salesman extraordinaire

by Susan Beckett

Originally published September, 2012

James has been selling since the age of 18, when he left Ypsilanti for California and went door-to-door selling a cleaning product called Advantage. For seven years he traveled the United States and Mexico, moving product in all but six states and learning to stand on his own.

“I don’t indulge in a lot of stuff like I did then,” James reflected. “I learned the hard way not to pitch my money away on stupid stuff. I’ve matured a lot. It helped me to become a man, knowing that Mom is a thousand miles away and can’t just come over and bail me out of a jam.”

He eventually settled in North Carolina and worked for a data survey company, Neighborhood Solutions. James went door-to-door talking with residents about proposed changes in their neighborhoods and soliciting their opinions and feedback on how improvements should be made. He also sold the *Winston-Salem Journal*.

With all that experience, it’s no surprise that James quickly became one of the top earners when he returned to Ypsilanti and began selling Groundcover. His stay here is temporary, as his jobs in North Carolina and his girlfriend and her children await his return.



Joe Woods often sells Groundcover, especially the \$10 special issues, on the corner of Liberty and Main.

James returned to Michigan at the request of his mother, who was in a car accident five years ago. Her health has been declining ever since. James came back early in 2010 to take care of her and make sure she was able to get to her medical appointments and get the treatment she needed.

He got a job selling windows when he first arrived but got laid off during the

recession. Selling Groundcover fits his experience, needs and personality. He sets his own hours so he can make his mom’s needs his top priority and still pay for his own expenses and help his mom out. He’s also saving to help with back-to-school expenses for his girlfriend’s children.

James said about selling, “You have people who are familiar and some who

are unfamiliar with Groundcover. I like running into those who are unfamiliar. I can get the word out that Groundcover is about real-life stuff and talk about important issues like poverty. I think people around here are proud of their community and want to know what is going on here.

“A couple of people have come back and actually thanked me because it’s a good paper and they never would have found it if I hadn’t taken the time to tell them about it. It’s also an opportunity to help people have a better day. Maybe I can say something that will spark them, or they will say something so I’ll have a better day!

“People aren’t as mean as Americans perceive them to be. There are a lot of nice, kind-hearted people out there, from young to old. I sell to teenagers, too,” said James.

The health of James’ mother is improving and he hopes to be back in North Carolina by the end of the year, though Ypsilanti will always be his home, too. He and his mom are starting a t-shirt business. James took a silk screen printing course a few years back and intends to print the shirts in North Carolina, but the headquarters might well be in Ypsilanti. If James is doing the selling, we know those t-shirts will go fast!



Hal Klenk has had many jobs and adventures in his life.

for Domino’s and for Airlines Parking until the September 11th tragedy greatly curtailed air travel and led to their being laid off.

The Domino’s job was insufficient to support him, so Hal, newly diagnosed with diabetes, filed for a non-service military pension. That income allowed him to move into an efficiency apartment at the Y located across from the downtown library in Ann Arbor.

see HAL, page 10

Tony’s sales success and overcoming setbacks started in his teens

by Susan Beckett

Originally published September, 2010

Chances are you’ve already met Tony, especially if you got your copy of Groundcover News while heading to your downtown office or strolling to your favorite Main St. restaurant or coffee shop. He and his display cart are downtown fixtures as he greets people and delivers the weather report or chats about the latest Tigers or Lions game. After receiving many requests for directions, he suggested we add a map to the paper to help visitors.

Tony knew he could sell newspapers – he started hawking the Shopping News when he was 11 and by 13 won a trip to Washington, D.C. as a top seller of the Detroit News. His earnings afforded him a new stereo and bicycle and a bank account as well as the chance to buy presents for his mom – the classic picture of dogs sitting around a poker table playing cards being the one he remembers most fondly.

Always a hard worker, his first encounter with the police came during a blizzard when he was 10 and went out to shovel snow for neighbors. They found him still shoveling 24 hours later after his parents reported him as missing. He was a high-spirited boy determined to lead in everything, which sometimes got him in trouble. The tenth of 14 children and the seventh son of a seventh son, he managed to channel most of his energy into rescuing animals, earning him the nickname “Bird.”

Tony was 12 when one of his brothers who had survived a tour in Vietnam was shot and killed in Detroit, and Tony started to drink. When his father died four years later, he drank a lot and got in some serious trouble. He completed his GED in a juvenile detention center and upon his release tried returning to high school at Sacred Heart but relapsed into heavy drinking. A far-sighted judge sent him to a Washtenaw County recovery program in 1978 as a last chance to stay out of prison.

Tony stayed sober for 25 years. He worked at a paper mill in Ypsilanti for several years before relocating and enjoying the economic boom in Texas. There he found employment as a rod man on a surveying team then moved into construction, chimney framing, brick and cement work and landscaping, learning and working his way up until he started his own landscaping business.

He recalled dumping the day’s grass



Tony’s sales virtuosity distinguished him as one of Groundcover’s first and best vendors. He was instrumental in getting Groundcover off the ground and is seen here at his first location, the corner of Liberty and Main.

clippings in the meadow of his cow-raising friend. “It got so they’d see my truck pull up and 15 or 20 cows would come running right to me.”

On a visit to Michigan, he met his future wife who eventually convinced him to move back north to be close to family. There he started Tony’s Handyman and utilized the skills he’d learned in Texas. His wife eventually left, relieving him from the constant temptation of drinking with her.

He held various jobs, stocking shelves, loading steel and even as a UAW machine operator for a Big Three parts manufacturer but got laid off when the plant was automated. He bought a house in Eastpoint and remarried into an instant family of three children who he still considers his own. The cat he rescued from a dumpster loyally brought offerings to his door each day, including the memorable day she lined up seven perfect rats, head to toe.

The dark period of his life included buying a second house up north and taking out a loan so his wife could return to school. The economy soured, loan payments soared and though he worked two jobs, he could not keep up with the payments and eventually lost everything. Despair and drinking led to his wife divorcing him. A neighbor in his rental apartment introduced him to crack at a time when he was desperate to feel good. After a Detroit area treatment facility released him, he was attacked in Detroit while attempting to score more crack.

He returned to the Washtenaw County program where he had sobered up as a

teen and was greeted like an old friend. He was directed to a three-quarter house where he could live for three months in a substance free environment. He slept a lot and did little but it was not until his three months were nearly over that he finally went to the hospital and learned he had emphysema and pneumonia.

The Delonis Center afforded him three more months of shelter and a sleeping bag to use when he left. Tony’s ditty from this time goes,

*You don’t know you’re homeless
until you realize that the roof over
your head
is the stars and the moon
and you pet the raccoon.*

While sleeping in fields and under bridges he made friends with Bandit the raccoon, a woodchuck and a skunk. During the early winter he acquired a second sleeping bag from the lieutenant at the Salvation Army where he had been attending Bible Study classes and AA meetings. He prided himself on being the best bottle and can collector in Ann Arbor and was able to buy personal items with the proceeds.

On his bike one night looking for bottles, he was stopped by police for not having a light on his bike. They arrested him on an outstanding warrant for non-payment from his business failure and he spent 6 months in the Macomb County jail, saving him from the most brutal part of winter.

Released with nothing but his bike, he went to the nearest Salvation Army and stayed a few days. He found his

stepson nearby and stayed with him for a month during which time he attended AA meetings, felt depressed and kept hearing Jesus on TV. His son helped him get back to Delonis where he got a blanket and returned to his old tent which Bandit had shredded in his absence. Luckily, he soon got a room at Delonis and substantial help from his caseworker, Cameron.

He regularly attended mass, AA meetings and a 12 Steps to God program and his depression has lifted. Cameron helped him secure temporary work at the Art Fair and that 45 hours helped him get on his feet. He heard about Groundcover and got started selling papers as soon as the Art Fair ended. Along with saving most of his money for a down payment on an apartment, he bought some small presents for his granddaughter and sent some money to help with expenses.

Tony is so pleased to be substance-free and productive. “I lost my wife who I love very much and I have only myself to blame. I know I must move on but be there for kids and the granddaughter who loves her Grand Pap and the baby grandson I have now! It’s good to be clean. It’s a great feeling. It’s better to be looked up at than to be looked down at!”

A minor setback befell him recently. His wallet fell from his pocket one hot Sunday morning as he was dragging his cart up Washtenaw on his way to sell papers at an area church. (Buses don’t run until later in the day on Sunday.) He resigned himself to losing the money that was in there but fervently hopes to get his driver’s license and personal papers back. If whoever has it drops the wallet in a mailbox or brings it to the Ann Arbor Police Department, it will make its way back to Tony.

He’s looking forward to moving into his own place and saving enough money so he can finance karate lessons to enhance his granddaughter’s self-discipline, get his ex-wife’s car fixed, and repay an outstanding loan from his father-in-law. He says, “I’m happy. I’ve lost 12 pounds since I started selling the paper. I like what I’m doing; meeting people, showing them what a gentleman I am. I love saying, ‘Good morning’ to people.”

Update: Tony now has housing through the Ann Arbor Housing Commission. He is in a committed relationship and doing well. He continues to sell Groundcover in downtown Ann Arbor and at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church.

Meet James M., Vendor #17

by Susan Beckett

Originally published October, 2010

When you first see James, he will likely be at the corner of Main and Ann hunched over a sketch pad inking Japanese anime or manga drawings. As he notices foot traffic pick up, he'll carefully put away his supplies and start actively selling Groundcover News. It is fellow artists and people who have had their own hard times in life who most often stop to buy from him, especially once they've talked with him and realize he hasn't yet thrown his life away.

He got started selling Groundcover soon after he arrived in Ann Arbor in mid-July. Prior to that, he was searching for jobs in Lansing but got discouraged when prospective employers seemed offended that he was asking for an application. With no alternative, he panhandled to survive.

He finds people are less suspicious when he is selling papers than when he is panhandling. "Some people treat me like just another bum begging, some like a vendor doing his job. It makes me feel really wonderful when people acknowledge I'm doing real work. It may not be the best job in the world, but I'm working and I'm proud of that."

"I so enjoy working with James," crowed Groundcover distributor Sandy. "He's stuck with it and steadily increased his sales. He should be proud!"

James speculated, "I have this thought when I'm panhandling or selling the paper that people are all thinking, 'Just get a job,' as if they were out there for the taking. I have some anxiety issues, so I don't interview well, which makes it even more difficult. I basically shoot myself in the foot."

On his own since 17, James notes his job history and the country's economic situation are perfectly in sync – which is not good at the moment. He was raised in poverty with a mother who worked in a bakery and a dad who took carpentry and painting jobs as they came along in rural New Hampshire. They never had much of anything and James received no allowance, so he learned early to work hard – shoveling driveways, raking and mowing.

"Fortunately, we lived in a trailer park back then, so there was always plenty of work available for me," James said. When he turned 16, he worked at Arby's, and at 17, breakfast restaurants.

Life got harder as his parents' marriage disintegrated into frequent fights and ultimately divorce when James was nine

or 10. His schoolwork became erratic with honor roll performances interspersed with periods of making C's and D's. At 13, he caught a break and got a job with a local farmer watering the greenhouse plants for \$10 a day. But he had trouble getting along with people, especially his family.

His mom remarried and James joined her in moving to Lansing, Michigan. Disagreements with his stepfather soon followed, and James shuttled back and forth between parents until neither could tolerate him any longer. His interests in anime, techno music and dressing in black led them to believe he was involved in devil worship, and on top of that he was rebellious. Tossed from his father's house in New Hampshire, James skipped school for a couple of weeks while he tried to find a place to sleep. The school discovered he was homeless and expelled him.

He then got the best job of his life – working in the kitchen at the Exeter Inn, a four-star restaurant and hotel. He started washing dishes, but was soon promoted to prep work then allowed to prepare salads and desserts. With the economic downturn came a layoff and a move to Michigan looking for better opportunity.

James mused that his parents subscribed to the philosophy, "throw your cubs off the mountain and raise the ones that manage to get back up."

With a history of dependency for the men on his father's side of the family, he thinks the extended family decided on tough love with him to force him to stand on his own. His parents helped him out occasionally enough to keep him alive, and his mother offered him a job once, but it was not on a bus route so he couldn't get there. Due to his family problems, James never learned to drive.

With no job prospects in Lansing, James turned to partying. Having watched the downward spiral of plenty of others, he was careful to avoid addictive substances. Still, his poverty took a toll on him. A genetic predisposition to weak teeth was exacerbated by sugary drinks and a lack of professional dental care, and his teeth deteriorated to the point where they became too fragile to chew with or brush without crumbling.

As his joblessness continued, he realized he needed an education and profession but did not know how to apply to college. The thought of going to college when he hadn't attended classes in so many years and had never completed high school was intimidating, but he

did look into applying while he was in Lansing.

When he arrived in Ann Arbor, James tried to find shelter and advice at the De-lonis Center but was denied because he was not a county resident. His girlfriend has been helping him get his life together and offering an occasional alternative to nights in a tent and quick showers at the shelter.

James loves art and is starting a new art portfolio. He's working hard to hold onto it. He has been experimenting with drawing on his own since he was 14, when his interest in Japanese anime and manga led to drawing. He's getting better all the time. He also likes reading and listening to music and he is fascinated by nature and natural systems like weather and geology.

As interested as he is in art, he assessed his odds of a financially successful career as an artist to be roughly equivalent to those of winning the lottery. "Right now, I'm looking for a job as a dishwasher. It's a job I can keep because I'm a fast-paced worker and that's what they need." He reasons that potential employers do not hire him to work with food because of the unhygienic appearance of his teeth.

"I want some kind of sensible job, one with job security. That's why I'm going to college," James explains. To that end, he's planning to start with basic courses, including one in career planning, and he'll complete his GED during that time.

Meet Hal

continued from page 8

Forced at age 62 to look for an apartment at market-rate when the Y was demolished, he filed for early Social Security then learned that he could get that or his military pension, but not both. Neither was sufficient to finance living in an apartment and paying other ordinary expenses.

He has been labeled by the Veterans Administration (VA) as "chronically homeless" for the past 10 years and put on the list for a Section 8 voucher. In the meantime, he lives at the Staples Center where the VA has rooms set aside for veterans for up to two years while they await permanent housing.



James had a rough start in life, but he has a strong moral compass and work ethic, and a passion for art.

The next chapter of James' life starts soon when he registers for winter term classes at Washtenaw Community College (WCC). "Financial aid isn't going to take care of everything. I'm going to need a part-time job so I can afford a place to live. It's going to be hard, and there are some people who'd rather see me fail, but I have to keep going. And I can't get upset if I'm treated unfairly. There are some people who will cheer me on."

Update: Thanks to Avalon Housing James now has a place to live, and he continues to sell Groundcover on a part-time basis. James has been doing a lot of drawing using the sketch book he received as a Christmas present and now that he is able to safely store his drawings, he is working on completing his portfolio.

A big music fan, Hal sings in the church choir and hopes to someday learn to read music and play an instrument. He has a vision of a new and used non-profit car dealership run by veterans that would sell cars to vets at just above list price. For himself, he would like to be an ordained minister and work full-time, perhaps for the Methodists. He plans to soon join Toastmasters to improve his public speaking.

We are proud to salute Hal in our Memorial Day issue and support him in selling Groundcover.

Update: as of fall of 2014, Hal is stably housed and recovering from a foot operation.

You can't backslide if you haven't been climbing

by Susan Beckett

Originally published July, 2016

The cover story run by *The Ann* in June 2016 left at least one reader wondering if she should continue to support all Groundcover vendors. The article was autobiographical and written by the late William Crandell, who also wrote for and sold Groundcover. He was candid about how his life fell apart and his subsequent drug and alcohol abuse, and that he sometimes used the money he earned selling Groundcover to buy alcohol.

I wish I could tell you that such a thing never happened or is extremely rare. It was one of my greatest concerns when starting Groundcover. I asked advice from John Loring, a former addict himself and then the director of PORT (an outreach division of Community Support and Treatment Services). He told me that an addict on a bender would not be organized enough to come to the office sober and with money to buy papers to resell. He said that someone determined to get high would find a way to do it, with or without Groundcover. He also said that the chances for recovery were much better if the individual had a structured activity and a community to return to.

Fasting from indifference – Pope Francis and Beyoncé style

by Susan Beckett

Originally published March 2016

Beyoncé and Pope Francis seem to be on the same wavelength when it comes to responding to the pain and need of "the other," as evidenced by their Super Bowl 50 half-time show and 2015 annual Lenten message, respectively.

Beyoncé delivered her message in her entertaining performance witnessed by the largest cross-demographic audience in our country. She told us to wake up – see – remember – acknowledge the obstacles and threats black Americans have faced and lived with since the 1960s.

She might have felt compelled to do so to combat what Pope Francis describes as the globalization of indifference. Ironically, one way this indifference is propagated is by distracting people with sports, vicarious winning, and other forms of entertainment, from social media and television to fine dining and dieting fads. Eager to exempt Lent from this trend and return it to a spiritual practice, Pope Francis urged people give up spiritual indifference for Lent.

Francis wrote that "whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no



Tabitha is one of the Groundcover vendors who has struggled with addiction but is now winning the battle, with more steps forward than back.

With that in mind, we insist that vendors be sober when they buy and sell Groundcover News. We encourage treatment for those struggling with addiction. We strive to be a supportive community where vendors can find solace and companionship in a sober environment. We try to replace judgment with compassion. It's not easy.

It helps me to remember the words of Ingrid Munro, who ran Jamii Bora, a

microcredit institution in Kenya: "One cannot lift a person out of poverty. What we can offer ... is a ladder that they can climb up to take themselves out of poverty. But the climbing they must do themselves."

She went on to say that some of Jamii Bora's borrowers are fast climbers and some of them are slow climbers – but they are all climbing.

us to notice that the white-dominated Academy nominated no black actors for major-category Oscars in 2015 and 2016.

And why is it that all major movie studios passed on financing "The Butler" until Harvey Weinstein came in at the end with funding for marketing and distribution? According to reporter and author of the book, "The Butler," Wil Haygood, it was the belief that no film would make money if all the lead actors were black. (It ended up as the top-grossing film for three straight weeks and exceeded \$100 million in box office receipts.)

Author Elie Weisel said, "The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference."

How do we act when we are not indifferent? We challenge unfair assertions whether they occur at the dinner table or the board room. We speak relentlessly to those with power when we encounter injustice. We radically and intentionally change our expectations. We change our own ethos from "don't get involved" to "find a way to help," maybe even heroically. And, accord-

That is how I look at Groundcover vendors. And when a person climbs, backsliding is not uncommon. Some take those first 10 free papers and parlay them into a viable income or a bridge to another job opportunity. Some, like Kevin Spangler – founder of the Boober Tours pedicab company – are at a place in their lives where they are ready to leave addiction behind and soar, going on to create businesses of their own or reclaim their place in the professional world.

Others sputter until they hit their stride. Then they often have long periods of stability until a calamity strikes and they lose their balance. Old traumas resurface. Dulling the pain leads back to old habits. And that first purchase might be financed by Groundcover sales. It could just as easily come from redeeming cans, panhandling or doing odd jobs.

But selling Groundcover has also become a habit and for many there is a pull to return that helps them recommit to sobriety. They miss their customers most of all. The conversation and support you provide makes them want to do better.

Thank you for being there for them.

ing to Pope Francis, spiritual growth is nourished through the pain or sacrifice of helping others, especially the poor.

But Beyoncé's challenge might be better met with creative engagement – a deliberate investment in African-American neighborhoods and businesses – to counter centuries of discriminatory lending. Compassion-based aid diminishes over time, while the impact of creative rebuilders continues to grow and attract further investment.

Visitors from Inshinomaki, Japan described such interventions at a Penny Stamps lecture in Ann Arbor on January 29, 2016. Ishinomaki was a post-industrial city already in decline when it was inundated by the 2011 tsunami. Along with disaster relief came a few business people who realized that the economy needed to be totally rebuilt.

While cooperative housing and kitchens helped restart traditional fishing in Inshinomaki, they also worked with companies to create new industries. As the schools were rebuilt, the curriculum was altered to start teaching computer skills in elementary school. This was bolstered with an Information Technology (IT) Bootcamp and Hackathon. Soon, Inshinomaki was IT-talent-rich.

see INDIFFERENCE, page 14

Pervasive justice shortcomings shame Michigan

by Susan Beckett

Originally published January, 2013

There are so many shortcomings in the Michigan justice system that demand immediate attention. Dysfunctional court clerks and computers, inadequate representation for indigent defendants, abusive bonding procedures, incentives for keeping people in the system, and a general lack of information about the jail and court procedures all need addressing.

I had no personal experience with courts, public defenders or bail bondsmen until last summer when one of our vendors was arrested in Belleville, part of Wayne County. She was accused of attacking someone. Her story was that he tried to violate her and she defended herself. She got no counseling or medical attention but was dragged into court where her public defender pushed her to accept a plea bargain that she thought meant she could leave right away and get back to her baby. When she later understood that was not the case, she was very distraught and asked to withdraw the plea.

Thanks to some generous Groundcover readers, I undertook getting her released on bail, a two-month odyssey during which my middle-class expectations of convenience, transparency and fairness were shattered.

Bail was set at 10 percent of \$10,000. The bail bondsman would post bail for a fee of \$330, if that was accompanied by an agreement of liability for the whole bond from two full-time working adults and the rights to a fully-owned automobile, should the bail conditions be violated. They also demanded that someone be with them when they posted bail to accept custody of the person upon their release.

This seemed absurd. We were still taking all the risk and inconvenience and paying them a lot of money just for fronting two-thirds of the cost. I tried to learn more about the process of posting bail but found none of my lawyer friends or any of the public defenders or prosecutors I called could explain the risks and process in more than vague terms, nor was the information on the Wayne County website. I did learn that if our vendor did not show up for any court proceeding or court-ordered procedure, the bail money would be in jeopardy.

I also learned from the prison guards that there was no way to post bail electronically. You could use a credit card, but only on-site, and through a govern-

ment approved third-party company that charged a hefty fee – on the order of 25 percent – which is disclosed in its entirety only once the transaction is in process. It rapidly became apparent that the “prison industrial complex” has little regard for the lives of those enmeshed in its system.

The guards shared that our vendor would not be released when bail was posted, since the court had ordered a tether and the tether department worked at their own pace during limited hours. They also told me I’d need to give them the name and phone number of the person she’d be staying with when she was released, and that she would be responsible for the \$100 tethering setup fee and an additional \$12-29 per day. Tethering has become commonplace even for those who are not flight risks and are already homeless.

Another volunteer and I went to the jail, toting our ten \$100 bills and address book. The guard expressed some surprise that we were posting bail ourselves, then told us that she had to run our vendor’s name for outstanding warrants. Unfortunately, one turned up for failing to appear at a hearing in Washtenaw County that occurred while she was incarcerated in the Wayne County Jail and of which she had no knowledge. The guard explained that if we were to bond her out, instead of her being released after tethering, she would be transferred to Washtenaw County. If they kept her and she missed any of the Wayne County-ordered appearances, we stood to lose the bail money. As we knew there was an evaluation that had to take place, we left without posting bail. There was no way for us to get a message to our vendor or to see her and explain the situation and get more details on the outstanding warrant.

I called and emailed the Wayne County court-appointed attorney for help in resolving the warrant and to get a firm date for the evaluation but got no response from him and learned on a subsequent visit that he did not contact his client about it, either. The day before the next hearing date, I learned that a judge’s convention conflicted with the hearing date and since the evaluation had still not been done, the hearing was postponed for another month. When I pressed the lawyer on the evaluation hold-up, he said that he had checked on it and the records indicated that they had already done it, but actually had not.

Even though there was no hearing, I drove into Detroit as planned to post bail, convinced this was the only way

she would ever get the evaluation and an opportunity for an adequate defense. Since it was during court hours, I had to post bail at the courthouse. When I tried to do so, they told me that it was no longer 10 percent of \$10,000, but the entire \$10,000. Sure that it was a mistake, I asked them to check. They tried, but only the judge, who was at the conference, and her clerk could give a definitive answer.

By then it was 12:15 p.m., and the clerk was not answering her phone; they told me she had stepped out for a few minutes. At 12:30, I asked them to check again and find out if she had gone to lunch. They did and said they thought so, so I left for lunch, too. Back at 1:00, I asked them to check again. At 1:20, I saw a group of employees returning and asked them to check again. Finally, at 1:30, I got permission to go to the clerk’s work area and ask around myself. All the doors were locked but someone did answer when I knocked on the Administration door. She informed me that the courts closed between noon and two for lunch and that the clerk would return at two. I asked her to verify that since the judge was gone and perhaps the clerk took that Friday afternoon off. She assured me the clerk would return.

At 2:15, an employee in the Drug Court noticed me, asked how I was, and decided to help me in response to my declaration of frustration. He called the judge’s secretary, who eventually emerged with a piece of paper detailing the various hearings that had taken place and conditions that resulted from them. He pointed to a hearing in Van Buren Township at which bail was set at \$10,000 and said that was the court that would have to change the bail amount. He confirmed my suspicion that the clerk was not returning.

I went to the nearby party store and got another money order so our vendor would be able to call me and find out what happened. As I headed toward Van Buren Township, I called the court for directions. The clerk I spoke with told me I had been misinformed, that the case in question now belonged to the Wayne County District Court and they had no jurisdiction over bail or anything else.

I accepted a call from our vendor and told her what had transpired. She called back an hour later to say she checked with the guards at the jail and bail really was \$1,000 but the court computer had



not been updated. She begged me to come back, which I could not do that day. However, I did stop by on Sunday on my way to another engagement. I arrived at 2 pm and was told that a shift change took place between 2 and 3 but I’d be first on the list at 3. Unable to wait, I called on my way home around 8:30 and learned that there were already so many people waiting to post bail that no more would be taken until the new shift started at 11:00 p.m.

I returned Monday afternoon at 3:45 so I could deal with the jail instead of the court but at a time when the jail had several bond officers working and no shift change was imminent. For the first time, I was informed that if bail conditions were violated, I was liable for the entire \$10,000. Though it gave me pause, I proceeded anyway because of the lack of viable alternatives.

Then I had to wait for a response from the Washtenaw County sheriff as to whether they were coming to get her. If not, she would need to be tethered and they would need the name of the person she would be staying with. I offered to provide the name and contact information so they would have what they needed in either case, since there was no scenario under which she would be free to leave with me. They told me I still had to wait. Finally, at 6:00, it was determined that the Sheriff was coming and that I could go. She would be returned to Wayne County for tethering once Washtenaw was done with her.

She was returned to Wayne County on Wednesday. As of the following Tuesday, she remained in jail awaiting a tether. After many calls from us inquiring as to the holdup, I learned that the jail had lost the bond receipt and had therefore not given the final okay to the tethering unit. They assured me they would proceed once I provided them with a copy of the receipt. At least they allowed me to do this electronically.

Again her release was delayed and she was transferred to Washtenaw County again for a pre-trial hearing on another

Every child deserves a fifth birthday

by Susan Beckett

Originally published July, 2012

A friend of mine who generously gives her time and money to local efforts to feed and house those in need recently suggested that, with so much suffering here in the States, we should concentrate our resources on meeting that need and leave the rest of the world to fend for itself for a while. That is a popular sentiment and certainly has some validity.

I just can’t get past abandoning 21,000 children to die every day from preventable causes. I feel badly if a child I know personally doesn’t have a celebration to mark their fifth birthday; the mothers of one out of eight children in Africa watch their children die before they reach five years of age.

Pervasive justice shortcomings

continued from page 12

matter. She was released on personal recognizance from Washtenaw County but returned to Wayne County on Friday for tethering. As of Monday, she was still in jail for no apparent reason. After several calls from me, a sergeant took a personal interest in her release.

She had another hearing on Tuesday, but it was conducted in chambers without the client present. A public defender whom she had never met “represented” her.

On Wednesday we learned that her release was delayed because the paperwork from the court was missing and there was a question about whether she really needed a tether, and if so, what kind. Judge Thomas’ clerk was out again and the substitute clerk could not locate the records requested by the sergeant. (Note that even the regular clerk was unable to locate records from court hearings occurring on days she was absent, which happened at least twice in this case.) The clerk was out again on Thursday, but luckily, the police discovered the problem: her paperwork had been stapled to that of another prisoner, so the police didn’t know they had it until they looked through the other prisoner’s paperwork. (She believes it was a deliberate act of retribution since she had filed official complaints about her treatment.)

She was given some flip-flops and transferred to the Hamtramck station for tethering. They did not return her personal property, which included her driver’s license. The remaining \$14 in

We know how to stop these deaths. Despite a tripling in population, effective interventions over the last 30 years have lowered that number from 42,000. In the process, smallpox was eliminated and polio was reduced by 99 percent, with no cases reported in India last year where it used to run rampant.

A vaccine for viral meningitis was introduced in sub-Saharan Africa in 2010 and infection rates plummeted 99 percent, with only four cases since. Maternal and neo-natal tetanus have been eliminated in 20 countries, and UNICEF is partnering with Kiwanis International to complete the job.

Global efforts to combat malaria have had marked effects on child survival where malaria is endemic. Nets and indoor spraying have reduced childhood malaria deaths in sub-Saharan Africa by as much as 50 percent. Because

her commissary account was applied to tether fees.

At Hamtramck, they fitted the tether and told her she had to be inside her Ann Arbor address by 6 p.m. Without a state ID, she could not take public transportation even if she could find someone to buy the ticket for her. More forms needed to be filled out and signed but because it was late, they told her to return on Monday, and added that she could retrieve her driver’s license from the jail then, though it is a mystery how they expected her to get there. They let her use a phone to arrange a ride. She was given paperwork for the tether but none about her upcoming court appearances or any other bond conditions.

She was able to reach a woman she had met in jail who agreed to drive her in exchange for \$30 which could be obtained once they reached Ann Arbor, thanks to the donation of one of our readers.

The next day we drove to the jail to get her ID and to the tether unit to turn in the remaining paperwork and get the paperwork on her release conditions. The release conditions and upcoming court appearance paperwork were missing. The officer was able to find the court appearance in the computer records and we recorded it.

She learned from a friend that the man she was charged with assaulting, who she says attacked her first, was in jail for a similar assault on another individual. An internet search on his name revealed a history of such behavior on his part. The police and her attorney had

malaria accounts for so many hospital visits and admissions – 30 to 40 percent of children under five in most African countries – effective malaria control means beds and resources are freed up to treat other children.

According to UNICEF director Carol Stern, the four keys to eliminating the remaining unnecessary child deaths are:

- New vaccines and drugs to fight HIV
- Technical innovations to bring down the cost of service
- Getting health workers into remote areas
- Girls’ education (linked to half of all such progress made)

Health kiosks explaining the importance of using a clean knife to cut the baby’s umbilical cord are saving lives

failed to do even that simple amount of investigating.

She reiterated her desire to plead not guilty but received no encouragement from her lawyer who she had tried to replace. She expected the hearing on the twelfth to be a review of the evaluation, but the judge wanted to proceed to sentencing. When she protested her innocence and desire for a trial, the judge cautioned against it, saying she would be tried for attempted murder, though that had never before been considered, and returned to jail.

Knowing she could not afford a private attorney and having already experienced the vindictiveness of the criminal justice system, she agreed to a sentence of time served and 15 months of probation. She later learned that the cost of her probation, \$600, was being passed on to her along with a fee of \$400 for the attorney she was not allowed to fire and other assorted fees prorated into payments of approximately \$100 per month for more than a year.

Getting the bail money returned was another ordeal, requiring six phone calls to get someone to explain the process. It took another personal appearance at the court to get a bond release form to present to the clerk so they could start the six- to eight-week process of preparing a check that would eventually be sent by mail. I called ahead and I was told they could only guarantee to be there first thing in the morning and would not check to make sure the paperwork was in order.

I arrived in early morning and was told to return another day since the comput-

er was down. I stubbornly insisted that since I had the original bond paperwork with all the conditions on it, they should be able to use the paper files and forms to process me. After 40 minutes of stalling, they complied. The last shock came when the clerk informed me that the check would be for \$900 instead of \$1,000, since there was a 10 percent charge for posting a 10 percent bond. That was not on the paperwork, nor was it ever mentioned, even by the thorough bond officer at the jail.

So much can be done with relatively little financial investment. Global leaders gathered for the Child Survival Call to Action meeting in Washington on June 14, with the bold agenda of ending preventable child deaths. They acknowledged that we’ve cut child preventable deaths in half over the past 30 years. Still, there are 7.6 million children every year who don’t reach their fifth birthday, and too many parents suffer, particularly when we have tools to prevent these deaths.

er was down. I stubbornly insisted that since I had the original bond paperwork with all the conditions on it, they should be able to use the paper files and forms to process me. After 40 minutes of stalling, they complied. The last shock came when the clerk informed me that the check would be for \$900 instead of \$1,000, since there was a 10 percent charge for posting a 10 percent bond. That was not on the paperwork, nor was it ever mentioned, even by the thorough bond officer at the jail.

As Michigan addresses criminal justice shortcomings, I suggest they include metrics on attorneys meeting with their clients prior to going to court to discuss a defense, not just determine a likely plea deal. Oversight should extend to the courts with scrutiny applied to the trail of records and paperwork in those counties like Wayne where it is a pervasive problem. Metrics on the length of time in jail prior to sentencing and the time elapsed between tests being ordered by the court and reported back should be tracked and benchmarked with penalties for consistently exceeding them. Complaints should be investigated, reported and replied to, and the county’s website should make it easy to register a complaint or ask a question.

The bail, jail, tether and probation systems appear to be self-serving money-makers with a vested interest in having their services used widely at the expense of those who are accused. At the very least, there should be fair standards for their use and no charges should be incurred by those who are innocent. And, above all, coerced plea bargains have got to stop.

A great place to live

by Susan Beckett

Originally published September, 2012

We live in such a special community. It often takes leaving it to really appreciate what we've got. As I finished my last meal in Washington, D.C.'s Union Station earlier this summer, a well-spoken man in his early 60s approached my table and asked if there was any uneaten food left. I looked at my plate and under the napkin and olive pits were the remains of my moussaka – about four forkfuls of ground meat.

Somewhat automatically, I replied, "It's just a little bit of hamburger."

"I don't care," he said. "I'll take anything."

Before I could react, he furtively looked around then swooped up the plate and alighted at a nearby table where he separated the trash from the food and wolfed down my leftovers with my fork. It just about broke my heart. When I later went to his table and gave him a little money for buying some



Meals at the Delonis Center provided by Food Gatherer's Community Kitchen and area volunteers are one of the resources that save folks in our area from extreme hunger.

more food, he responded as if no one had ever done so before. I had earlier witnessed a much younger man passing the outside of an eatery and reaching over to an abandoned plate to grab the remains of a hot dog, which he quickly

popped into his mouth. Hunger is clearly a pervasive problem in our nation's capitol.

Outside Union Station there was a man selling *Street Sense*, that city's street

newspaper, and the D.C. Kitchen which prepares meals that are served through various social service agencies. But it appears that they don't have a place like the Community Kitchen at the Delonis Center or the Breakfast Program at St. Andrew's, where anyone can just come for a meal.

This lack is not confined to our nation's capitol. Just last month in Detroit I was approached by a man in a wheelchair asking for food; not money for food, just food.

The generosity of our Washtenaw County community allows everyone to eat with dignity and insulates us from witnessing extreme hunger and deprivation. That has real value to me, allowing me to enjoy my own comfort. Experiencing the discomfort again, as I did in D.C., reminds me of one reason why we donate to food drives, staff food pantries and meal programs, and support these programs financially. Thank you for doing your part to make Washtenaw County a great place to live!

Ridding my prejudices is harder than finding low-income housing in Ann Arbor!

by Susan Beckett

Originally published January, 2014

The conversations never cease to surprise me, which demonstrates how deeply ingrained my prejudices are. After all, I work with housing-insecure people nearly every day and know that many are educated and highly intelligent.

This was my third year as a driver and overnight host at the Rotating Shelter, a program in which area congregations host up to 25 unhoused men for a week or two at a time. Due to my experiences in previous years, the men's efficiency and graciousness in unloading and setting up their mattresses and bedding for the week, their consideration in looking out for one another, their kindness to each other and all of us, and their good manners and general friendliness – atop weariness for some – seemed routine.

The next morning was not. The morning discussion of books piqued my interest. They discussed books one of the men had picked up for a young man notorious for reading as he panhandled, and they weighed in on whether or not the selections matched his taste in books. The books the man had picked up for himself included "The Scarlet Letter" and several other classics.

Driving my first passengers to the St. Andrew's Breakfast Program, the men discussed job applications and how

area employers recognized the post office box and phone number at the Delonis Center, as well as its address. Some tried to hide their homelessness to avoid the discrimination rampant among area businesses. Another asserted that as long as you were completely forthcoming about your situation, there were employers like Zingerman's that would give you a chance and really take care of you if you did a good job. Again, conversation not too unusual.

But my second group of passengers first joked about needing to catch a 10 a.m. jet to Geneva to work on the Hadron Collider or a plane to New York City to address the United Nations. Then they launched into a discussion of precognition and whether it was the subconscious revealing what was preordained, or if it could be explained by the theory of relativity – that everything that has ever occurred or will is always happening. They cited various laws of physics and thermodynamics, such as the conservation of energy, and their applicability to déjà vu.

I found my mind meandering to my thrown thinking – these are intelligent and educated men with social skills. Why don't they have jobs and housing?

Snippets of other morning conversations drifted into my consciousness in response. One man who has been working steadily, still in the program because he and his fiancée have been unable to find an affordable apartment.

The income of another going to child support. Another embroiled in a time-consuming fight to gain custody of his children. Yet another leaving a good job so that the taint of a personal vendetta would not spill over onto a good employer.

None of this should surprise me, nor does it when I consciously think about it. But just under the surface of my consciousness lurk the stereotypes

Fasting from indifference

continued from page 11

An IT business there now employs many who work remotely for major corporations.

University of Michigan (U-M) School of Art and Design Professor Nick Tobier described how a similar strategy is being used in Detroit neighborhoods that are way outside the downtown area being revitalized, particularly the Brightmoor neighborhood. U-M students and faculty have been working there with residents for over 20 years to create and develop local industries.

A new \$100,000 grant from the Knight foundation is enabling the Stamps School of Art and Design to open a Maker Space in Brightmoor in conjunction with their K-12 schools. Scheduled to open in April, the Maker Space will further nurture creative engagement, offering art

cultivated by years of comments, media portrayals and the American work ethic corollary that, if you are poor, it is because you are lazy or deficient.

I wish I could "resolve away" my stereotypes, but the closest resolution I can make is to be alert for the appearance of all my prejudices and challenge them with reality, until a new, more balanced paradigm takes hold in my mind.

and design workshops from prototyping and 3D printing, to hands-on work with wood, to entrepreneurship programming and more. It includes locally driven entrepreneurial initiatives that will help monetize new businesses from local inventions, such as heated clothing to combat the cold while waiting for buses which run rarely in the remote neighborhoods, and a solar bike light built from a Gatorade bottle.

This infusion of money, creativity, pro bono expertise and education, combined with an entrepreneurial outlook, fits the formula for success derived from experience in Inshinomaki. Further, it is welcomed by residents as it invests in them, recognizing their talent and ability.

And isn't that the opposite of indifference? Finding in others that which we can appreciate, connect and engage with?

Once we were strangers

by Susan Beckett

Originally published May, 2017

With so much attention focused on immigrants, some in my circle have begun sharing the stories of how our families came to this country. My husband's ancestors included Quakers escaping religious persecution in England. Another set came from Scotland – one was a Highlander and the other a Lowlander at a time when the two groups were deadly enemies and the couple could not live safely in either area.

My friend Lorene's great-grandparents abandoned Ireland during the great potato famine. One of her husband's great-grandparents fled conscription by the Russian Czar.

My maternal grandparents came from Russia and Romania at the start of the 20th century to escape pogroms. My other grandparents brought my father here from Germany in 1938, barely escaping the Nazis. There were strict immigration quotas for Jews at that time and they all needed someone to sponsor them – to assume financial responsibility in case they were unable to support themselves.

My grandfather had seen trouble coming and sent his much-younger brother to America with money to start a business and get established here. Unfortunately, the brother made some bad investments and was not in a strong enough financial position to sponsor my grandfather when the time came.

My great-grandfather had 16 siblings and a handful had immigrated to the United States some years earlier. My grandfather wrote all his cousins, desperately seeking a sponsor. He suffered the stigma of being the "smart one." In Germany, each branch of our family ran a rag collection business in a different town. They were part of a larger business that made the rags into paper. My grandfather was sent to the university so he could be the comptroller of the larger business. His male cousins were particularly disgruntled about that. Perhaps that is why they ignored his pleas for sponsorship. Eventually, one of his cousins and her husband responded from Indianapolis saying that they would be his family's sponsor.

Between the Depression and anti-German sentiment that extended to German refugees, the early years were not easy. Jews were not allowed to take money with them from Germany but

my grandparents had managed to take a large quantity of furniture and musical instruments along with some jewelry. They sold much of it to support themselves.

As happens with many immigrants, my grandfather's advanced degrees and professional experience were of small value here. It was my grandmother, who had never worked a day in her life, who first found a job – cooking for children at a summer camp in the Berkshires – by virtue of her culinary arts degree from a fancy French cooking school. I can't imagine that it went well.

My earliest memory of her cooking is gagging on aspic, a savory gelatin served with meat, which my parents assured me was a delicacy but that my sister and I found disgusting. By that time, my grandmother was teaching French and German at the nearby Springfield Massachusetts High School of Commerce. A woman who longed to study psychiatry with Freud, she resented being forced instead to study cooking, marry, have children and then spend most of her adult life catering to children.

My grandfather eventually found work selling advertising on give-away items to local businesses. His garage-full of pens, sifters, rain hats, rulers, piggy banks and other promotional items was a treasure trove for visiting children. He delighted in our appreciation of the kingly stores he so freely shared. He made rounds to customers for the rest of his life, enjoying the visits and conversation, more content than resentful. Feeling that all his years of education were a waste, he never pushed his sons academically, though both graduated from college anyway.

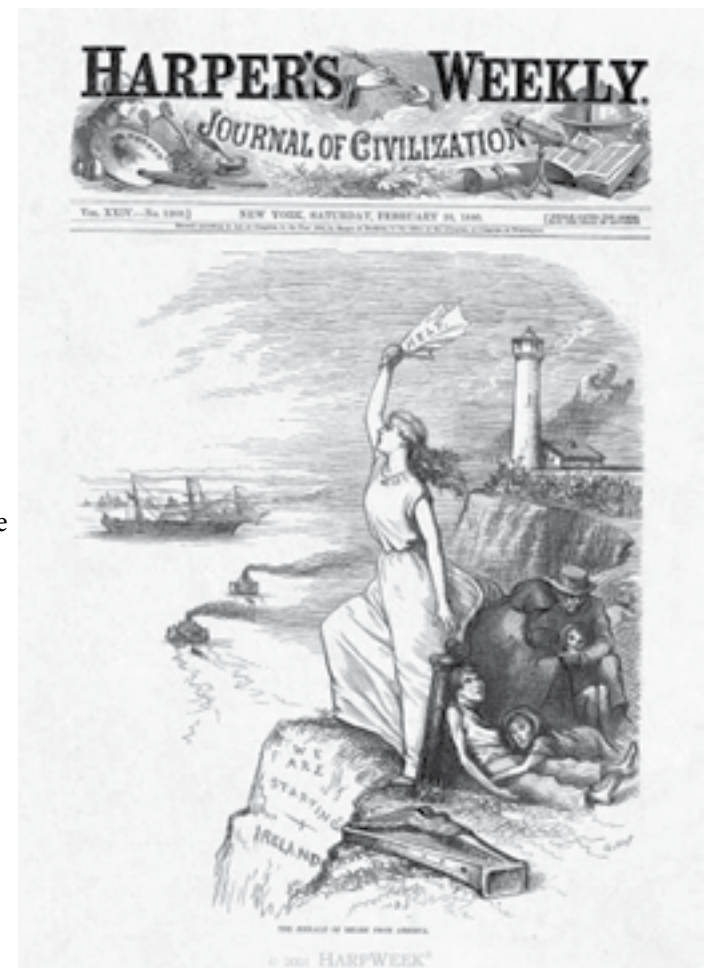
Though they all faced difficulties, one major difference between our ancestors' immigration stories and those of today is the worry of deportation. Even my Romanian grandfather, who was 19 when he arrived in New York and purportedly got caught up with the Jewish mob, never feared being sent back. Had they felt that their new country was also against them, I don't know if they would have been able to strive and sacrifice so that their children would be safe and thrive.

Many of the great American innovators have been second- or third-generation innovators. Would Elon Musk have been able to concentrate in school if his mind wandered with worry that his parents might be taken at any time?

And what of the future? Will we lose our competitive edge in the high-tech industries when highly skilled foreign-born workers are no longer granted H-1 visas? Will large numbers of U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants wind up in our foster care system? The Pew Research Center estimates that four million children will be placed in the foster care system if Trump really does deport 11 million people. And what of the rest?

In the next decades will we be swamped with the return of U.S.-born children who left with their undocumented-immigrant parents? Thousands of these children whose first language is English go to Mexico and Central America when their parents are deported. They struggle to recover from the trauma of displacement and they struggle to learn in Spanish, a language in which many have only a limited academic vocabulary. Will they acquire the education and resiliency to be productive citizens or will we have made them into the shiftless leeches their parents are unfairly portrayed as?

And who will help the farmers with their fruits and other delicate crops that must be handpicked? There are not enough unemployed Americans who have the physical ability and life



The Irish potato famine ushered in large groups of immigrants to America. Like the Italians and Jews, as well as today's Muslims, they were often persecuted rather than welcomed.

circumstances to undertake all of the grueling, itinerant harvesting jobs.

We could avoid many of the problems posed by mass deportations if we allow those who have respected our laws and worked steadily to return quickly – or better yet be diverted from deportation. They could be granted appropriate legal status to work here for a designated period of time during which they could apply for citizenship. For years, there has been bipartisan talk of the need for immigration reform that includes a guest worker program. Instead of condoning decrees that disrupt families and our economy, Congress must finally pass a humane and comprehensive immigration reform package.



Beckett's father, Peter Wolff, was one of many Germans who immigrated to the United States in the 1930s to escape persecution and violence.

Story makers – adventures with my father

by Susan Beckett

Originally published June 2011

My dad provided the adventure in our family. His early dates with my mother included teaching her to ski and taking her sailing. That he stranded the boat on a sand bar and my water-fearing, non-swimmer mother married him anyway, still amazes me.

I once took them camping at Silver Lake State Park. Dad was soon itching for action so we rented a sunfish and sailed across Silver Lake to the dunes that hid Lake Michigan. He was quite a sight there, perched on the edge of the heeling boat, smoking his cigar. He must have forgotten who raised me, because when I brought the zipping boat around rather abruptly, he forgot to duck and the boom swatted him into the water. He was grabbing for his cigar as my mother yelled, "Pete, Pete, grab your glasses!"

It was Dad who impelled and orchestrated our frequent ski trips. We would drive from New Jersey to Vermont two or three times a month when the snow was good, often for just a weekend. While other families huddled by the fire in the lodge escaping the sub-zero temperatures, my Germanic father crowed about the lack of lift lines and herded us onto the slopes. By the age of six, I knew well how to gently warm frostbitten fingers.

They nearly lost me one blustery day when the wind and snow were driving so hard you could barely see. Our little group disembarked from the chair lifts and stood atop Mt. Mansfield, wondering which way to go. A sudden enormous gust grabbed my little body and blew me and all my cries for help backwards down the mountain. One of the adults grasped my flailing arm just in time, but by then I was far enough from the summit that our path down was set; it was not easy!

Our most dramatic adventure started out West at Heavenly Valley, a ski area on the California/Nevada boundary. It was another snowy day and my mother and sister elected to gamble rather than face vertigo but all my father saw was the foot of fresh powder and he was determined to enjoy it. By then I was in my twenties and he was nearing sixty and though I longed to risk only my money in a nice warm casino, I consented to accompany my father,



Beckett survived her father's Sierra Nevada folly and went on to have further ski adventures with her husband, children and parents. Pictured left to right: Robby, John and Susan Beckett, Dorothy and Peter Wolff, and Alicia Beckett.

fearing what might happen if he went out alone.

Our first runs were great as we hugged the edge of the slope and the trees provided some contrast to the thick steadily falling flakes. But on our third run, a group of young guys zipped past us and headed into the woods, whooping and hollering as they went.

Some atavistic pack instinct engaged and my father followed them, whooping away. I tagged along but started yelling when I saw them passing the "Out of Bounds" markers. By the time Dad heard me and stopped, he was twenty feet downhill of the markers and determined not to climb back up. "Skiers always go down," he admonished.

His experience with Eastern mountains was that if you skied down, eventually you would reach the bottom of some trail. Unable to convince him that the Sierra Nevadas were different, I reluctantly followed though the temptation to abandon him was even stronger than it had been in the morning. We soon reached a ledge and again Dad followed the boys around the edge, barely big enough for the two skis. A wonderful, steep downhill stretch followed and the boys disappeared.

On our own we skied down another 45 minutes or so and encountered brambles by a river. The snow here was more sparse and wet and we used our skis more like snowshoes. I finally put

my foot down when Dad wanted to go upriver where there was less vegetation. "I am not going into the heart of the Sierra Nevadas with you. I am following the river out, probably to Lake Tahoe," I decreed and started walking. When he saw I was not even looking back, his nostrils flared in anger, but he followed me.

By now it was late afternoon and I took note of the wild leeks, thinking that if we were stranded, at least we had something to eat and a source of water and we could use my father's matches to start a fire. We trudged on for hours; the weather cleared and we could finally see Lake Tahoe in the distance.

At dusk, we emerged at an outpost of civilization, five houses in a little cul-de-sac. Dogs barked wildly from the nearest house – the only one with lights on – and we approached.

I rang the bell and was confronted by a large t-shirted man regarding me with suspicion. I asked

if we could use a phone to call for a ride. Totally blocking the door, the man asked what we were doing there. I told him the story and he said incredulously, "You started from Heavenly? That's about 20 miles away!" As he regarded my father who could barely move at this point, the veracity of our story sunk in on him. "I'll call the local Dial a Ride. They'll pick you up and take you back to Lake Tahoe," he said as he closed the door in our faces.

We trudged to the street and before settling on the curb, noticed the mailbox carefully lettered, "The Capones." I considered this latest brush with death and pondered how worried my mother and sister would be by now. It was dark and dinner time and my father was never late for dinner. I imagined them calling the police and started scanning the sky for search and rescue helicopters.

The little bus finally arrived and after sinking into the seat, Dad pulled out his last cigar and his book of matches. The matches were so soaked with perspiration, they wouldn't light. Bursting my fantasy of a big bonfire attracting the helicopters, I was distinctly irate despite my father's despondence.

Imagine my further surprise when we reached the hotel room before my sister and mother and learned they hadn't even know we were missing! My famished father insisted on going for a buffet dinner. He loaded his plate and sat down heavily. He managed to swallow a couple of bites before his head fell to his plate and he slept there at the table while I told the tale of our latest adventure.

Follow the sound of the bell

by Susan Beckett

Lacerated souls buttonholed.
Past mistakes reverberating,
enervating, debilitating.

Arranged to pique, to teach, to entertain.
Stutter-stepping, shamed and oft regretting
Oscillating, tessellating,
gravitating beyond
Remorse, into stillness, space. Beckoning
the next act to supplant, replace, reinvigorate
a future once imagined
but
long ago forgotten or abandoned.